



U.S. Immigration

Summary sheet: visa, status, agencies, green card, naturalization

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2. Visa vs. status: two distinct concepts

A visa is a travel document issued by a U.S. consulate abroad. It shows classification (B-2, F-1, H-1B, etc.) and lets you apply for entry. A visa does not guarantee admission.

Status is granted or denied at entry by CBP and recorded on Form I-94 (i94.cbp.dhs.gov). It sets the admitted classification and authorized stay or D/S.

Visa validity and I-94 authorized stay do not always match. Follow your status purpose and verify current rules on official websites.

3. Federal agencies: roles and authority

DOS: consular visas, Visa Bulletin, DV Lottery, DS-160/DS-260.

USCIS: in-country filings (I-130, I-140, I-485, I-765, I-131, N-400).

CBP: border inspection, admission, I-94, ESTA/WVP.

DOL: PERM labor certification for many employment-based green cards.

5. Main nonimmigrant visa categories

B-1/B-2: temporary business or tourism, no U.S. paid employment.

F-1: SEVP study, I-20, SEVIS fee, strict work rules.

H-1B: specialty occupation, annual cap, employer I-129 sponsorship.

L-1: intracompany transfer. O-1: extraordinary ability. E-2: treaty investment.

Full list on travel.state.gov. Confirm fees and rules on official sites.

6. Lawful permanent residence (LPR / green card)

LPRs may live and work long-term in the U.S. subject to law and residency rules.

Main paths: family (I-130), employment (PERM + I-140), DV Lottery, humanitarian routes.

Monthly Visa Bulletin shows when immigrant visa numbers are current.

Renew the physical card via I-90 when it expires. Check uscis.gov for current fees.

7. Family immigration: Form I-130

I-130 establishes qualifying family relationship. It alone does not grant a green card.

Immediate relatives (U.S. citizens): spouse, unmarried children under 21, parents.

Preference categories F1-F4: quotas and priority dates in the Visa Bulletin.

After approval: NVC consular processing or I-485 if eligible inside the U.S.

8. Employment immigration: PERM and Form I-140

Typical steps: PERM/ETA-9089 (DOL), I-140, then consular visa or I-485.

EB-1 through EB-5: distinct rules and timelines.

Priority date: PERM or I-140 filing date depending on category. Wait for Bulletin before final step.

9. Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery

About 55,000 immigrant visas yearly for countries with low U.S. immigration rates.
Registration is FREE only at dvprogram.state.gov during the annual window.
WARNING: any paid third-party registration site is a scam. One entry per person.
Selection does not guarantee a visa: medical exam, interview, inadmissibility review.

10. Humanitarian pathways: asylum, refugee, TPS, parole

Asylum (I-589): protection for those in the U.S. or at the border.
Refugee: protection sought from abroad through resettlement programs.
TPS: temporary status for nationals of designated crisis countries.
Complex cases require specialized legal counsel and uscis.gov guidance.

11. Naturalization: Form N-400

General requirements: 5 years LPR (3 if married to U.S. citizen), physical presence, good moral character.
Civics test and Oath of Allegiance. Study materials at uscis.gov/citizenship.
Verify exact criteria and N-400 fees on uscis.gov when you file.

12. Consular processing vs. I-485 adjustment

Consular (abroad): NVC, DS-260, I-864, consular interview, immigrant visa, then entry.
I-485 (U.S.): if present, admissible, and visa number available. Possible EAD (I-765) and Advance Parole (I-131).
Choice depends on residence, current status, and 3/10-year bars. Legal advice recommended.

13. ESTA and Visa Waiver Program (VWP)

French nationals (biometric passport): tourism/business stays up to 90 days without B visa if ESTA approved.
Official application: esta.cbp.dhs.gov only. No employment or long-term study.
ESTA denial: B visa may still be possible. Obey CBP-authorized VWP stay limits.

14. CBP and Form I-94

CBP records admission and sets authorized stay on electronic I-94.
Retrieve records at i94.cbp.dhs.gov. Correct errors promptly through CBP.
Secondary inspection: additional review, not an automatic denial.

15. Extension or change of status: Form I-539

I-539 extends or changes nonimmigrant status. File before current status expires.
Not all status changes are allowed in-country. Instructions: uscis.gov/i-539.

16. Work and travel authorization: I-765 and I-131

I-765: EAD for eligible categories (pending I-485, F-1 OPT, etc.).
I-131: Advance Parole, Reentry Permit, Refugee Travel Document.
Leaving the U.S. without Advance Parole during pending I-485 may abandon the application.

17. Public charge

INA 212(a)(4): denial possible if likely to become primarily dependent on public benefits.
USCIS weighs income, resources, I-864. Evolving policy: uscis.gov/greencard/public-charge.
Verify rules in effect on your filing date.

18. Key forms overview

DOS: DS-160, DS-260 (ceac.state.gov), I-864.
USCIS: I-130, I-140, I-485, I-539, I-765, I-131, N-400, I-589.
Fees: uscis.gov/forms/filing-fees. Forms: uscis.gov/forms.

19. Typical consular sequence (4 steps)

1. Approved petition or prerequisite (I-130/I-140 or employer/school package).
2. DS-160 or DS-260 online via CEAC, fee payment.
3. Consular interview (Paris, Marseille by category), immigrant medical exam.
4. U.S. entry, CBP inspection, download I-94, comply with granted status.

20. French nationals: practical notes

VWP/ESTA for short stays. Beyond 90 days or for work/immigration: proper status required.

Visas from France: fr.usembassy.gov. Do not confuse with france-visas.gouv.fr (entry to France).

France-U.S. tax treaty and FBAR/FATCA: separate from immigration, plan ahead.

Federal agencies: main roles

Agency	Mission	Examples
DOS	Consular visas, Visa Bulletin, DV	DS-160, DS-260, NVC
USCIS	In-country filings	I-130, I-140, I-485, N-400
CBP	Border inspection, I-94	ESTA, admission
DOL	Labor certification	ETA-9089 PERM

Key forms (overview)

Form	Purpose	Agency
DS-160	Nonimmigrant visa	DOS
DS-260	Immigrant visa (NVC)	DOS
I-130	Family petition	USCIS
I-140	Employment petition	USCIS
I-485	Adjustment of status	USCIS
I-765	Work authorization	USCIS
I-539	Extension / change	USCIS
N-400	Naturalization	USCIS
I-864	Affidavit of Support	DOS/USCIS

Frequently asked questions

Q. What is the difference between a visa and status?

The visa is issued abroad by DOS; status is granted at entry by CBP on Form I-94. A valid visa does not guarantee admission.

Q. Does a French citizen need a B visa for a two-week vacation?

Generally no if ESTA is approved and the stay is 90 days or less with no work. Otherwise apply for a B-2 visa.

Q. Is the DV Lottery free?

Yes, free registration only at dvprogram.state.gov. Any paid site is a scam.

Q. Does this guide replace an attorney?

No. Consult a licensed immigration attorney for a tailored strategy.

Official links (U.S. government)

USCIS : <https://www.uscis.gov>

Department of State (visas) : <https://travel.state.gov>

CBP : <https://www.cbp.gov>

ESTA : <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>

I-94 : <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>

DV Lottery : <https://dvprogram.state.gov>

Visa Bulletin : <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin.html>

USCIS filing fees : <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-fees>

Ambassade USA Paris : <https://fr.usembassy.gov/visas/>